DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 183 CG 008 785

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TITLE Interpersonal Perception: The Effect of Mode of Self-Presentation of Accuracy of Perception.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 12p.; Presented at the Eastern Psychological Association Convention (Washington, D. C., May, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Science Research; College Faculty; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Perception; *Self Concept; Speeches; Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS *Goffmans Theory of Self Presentation

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the utility of applying the conceptual framework of Probabilistic Functionalism to specific dimensions of Goffman's theory of self-presentation. Of particular concern is evaluation of the implications of this reconceptualization for empirical investigation of the effects of central concepts of Goffman's theoretical view. The study consists of two major parts: (1) translation of the parameters involved in self-presentation into a multiple-cue judgment task compatible with the lens model paradigm; and (2) utilization of this task as stimulus material for investigation of interpersonal learning. Specifically, 20 faculty members participated in filmed and taped interviews which were presented to 45 undergraduates under one of three experimental conditions: (1) film and audio; (2) film only; or (3) audio-tape only. They were to indicate the likelihood of good relations with that person and a prediction of the estimate each stimulus person would make of his relationship to students. Results indicate that subjects show internally reliable judgmental systems as measured by the multiple correlation among cue values and responses for each subject. (Author/HMV)

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ED 089183

Interpersonal Perception: The Effect of Mode of Self-presentation of Accuracy of Perception *

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The present investigation explores the utility of applying the conceptual framework of Probabilistic Functionalism (Brunswik, 1952; 1956) to specific dimensions of Goffman's theory of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). Of particular concern is evaluation of the implications of this reconceptualization for empirical investigation of the effects of central concepts of Goffman's theoretical view (e.g., personal front, setting, etc.), upon social perception.

Goffman (1959) in his descriptive analysis of the presentation of self in ordinary interpersonal interaction offers compelling observational data to provide support for his theoretical approach. A striking feature of this data is its compatibility with the focii of investigations derived from "cognitive" approaches to social perception. Unfortunately, there have been few successful attempts to investigate empirically the theoretical consequences of this view. Brunswik's Probabilistic Functionalism

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* Presented at the Eastern Psychological Association Convention, Washington, D. C., May, 1973.

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(Brunswik, 1952; 1956) provides an integrated theoretical-methodological framework which has allowed systematic empirical investigation of dimensions of interpersonal relations compatible with Goffman's approach. This paper briefly describes the two approaches and their relationship, then presents data from a preliminary investigation which focuses upon the effects of one independent variable derived from the above conceptual integration, mode of self-presentation, upon interpersonal perception.

Self-Presentation

Goffman (1959) describes the communication of messages about the self as incorporating information which goes beyond that contained in verbal statements. To the extent that one is able, an individual "manages" the various aspects of a situation, e.g., personal front and setting, in order to convey to others a particular impression of "self". The "personal front" includes characteristics of voice, dress, clothing, etc., while the "setting" includes dimensions of both the social and physical environments. Control over the physical and social characteristics of the environment is generally considered to be an advantage in an interaction since it gives the controlling party the opportunity to manipulate variables presumed to affect others' perceptions. Indeed, control over a setting is likely to be attributed to the individual in whose "territory" interaction occurs whether or not the person has such control; therefore, everything within the setting may be considered to function as part of the message-bearing paraphernalia, or "sign equipment," of that person. The self which is revealed in ordinary interpersonal interaction may be viewed as a product of the interaction, and corresponds but is not limited to factors within the performer. Independent of the degree and direction of

the intentions of the performer, others act as if the impression which they have received is the one which the performer intended. To the extent that perception matches intention, the performer has effectively fostered a given definition of the situation and a specific impression of self. In short, the self is perceived as corresponding to the performer's intention-to-present-self. Various situational components, including aspects of the physical setting and the social context, and the person's manner and appearance all serve to express various attributes of self. In essence, such components serve as cues about the person or "performer".

Probabilistic Functionalism

The conceptual framework of Probabilistic Functionalism, as presented by Brunswik (1952; 1956), and further developed by Hammond and his associates (Hammond, 1956, 1965), focuses upon the behavior of an individual as that person comes to terms with his environment. Distal characteristics of the environment are mediated by proximal cues which serve as the immediate source of data for the individual. Figure 1 represents a situation in which a distal state of affairs, Y, is mediated by a set of proximal cues, X_1, X_2, and X_3. S_1 and S_2 represent different individuals' responses to or judgments about that distal state of affairs. Thus, for example, if the distal state (Y) is another person, the mediators (X_1, X_2 and X_3) may be attributes of the individual which allow the respondent to make an inductive inference concerning the person.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 specifically represents a situation in which two individuals make judgments about a distal state on the basis of the same set of proximal cues but use different "weighting systems" in their judgments. That is, S_1 weights X_1 primarily whereas S_2 weights X_3 primarily. The methodology accompanying this conceptual framework allows for analysis of the various components and/or dimensions of the inferential process. Further, this paradigm has been applied successfully across a wide range of experimental situations including learning, interpersonal conflict, and interpersonal learning, i.e., the case of one person learning to predict the responses of another to a variety of situations (Hammond, Wilkins, and Todd, 1965). In the present case, it is this process of interpersonal learning (or interpersonal understanding, Miller, 1972) which is of primary concern. Investigations of interpersonal understanding within this paradigm have emphasized the need to view person perception in an interactive context, subject to the myriad influences stemming from the dynamics of interpersonal interaction. These studies have provided data about the effects of both individual and interactive variables affecting the perception one person gains of another (e.g., cognitive complexity, interperson similarity, etc.).

Goffman's formulation emphasizes the "self" as <u>mediated</u> through various aspects of the total situation including personal front and setting variables (or cues); these serve as the basis for the impression formed by another person. Thus, Goffman's conceptualization may be translated directly into constructs derived from the lens model paradigm. Our concern in this study, then, is to evaluate whether such a translation is useful for understanding the operation of the parameters of interpersonal interaction

suggested by Goffman. One difficulty encountered in attempts to investigate Goffman's view stems from the rich texture of interacting variables in self-presentation which are difficult to reproduce within the confines of factorial design and orthogonal arrangement of stimulus variables. Probabilistic Functionalism with its stress on representative design, employs guidelines for ecological study combining laboratory rigor with representative circumstances. Thus, evaluation of Goffman's theoretical parameters is made possible.

Method

The present study had two major parts. The first involved the translation of the parameters involved in self-presentation, as viewed by Goffman, into a multiple-cue judgment task compatible with the lens model paradigm. The second part of the study involved the utilization of this task as stimulus material for investigation of interpersonal learning. Specifically, a sample was collected of 100 photographs of faculty members designed to capture each individual as he/she would ordinarily interact with others - especially students.

Using the photographs indicated above, four cues, derived from Goffman's conceptualization, were scaled using Q-sort and Single Stimulus methods. These were: 1) formality, 2) barrierness, 3) personalization, and 4) status. Application of an adaptation of the Campbell-Fiske (1959) multitrait-multimethod approach indicated achievement of necessary levels of task reliability and validity. Further, cue values were found to be partly intercorrelated with one another as would be expected with this type of stimulus material.

Twenty of the above faculty members, selected to represent as wide a range of cue values as possible, participated in filmed and taped interviews on the subject of faculty-student relations. The films and audio-tapes of these interviews were then used as a judgmental task formally similar to those used in previous investigations within the lens model paradigm. Values for a criterion variable, the self-perceived likelihood of good relations with students, were obtained by self-report from each of the faculty members.

Forty-five undergraduate subjects were presented a sequence of twenty cases in one of three experimental conditions: 1) film and audio-tape, 2) film only, and 3) audio-tape only. Subjects were asked to respond to each case by indicating 1) the likelihood of good relations with that person, and 2) a prediction of the estimate each stimulus person would make of his/her likelihood of good relations with students. Responses for each of the above were made on a 20-point scale, the higher the value, the more positive the rating. (For a more detailed description of the procedure, see McKeithan, 1973.)

Results

The question of whether Goffman's formulation can be translated into an interpersonal judgmental task requires examination of the results which describe the characteristics of that translation in 1) formal terms, i.e., task characteristics, and 2) responsive terms, i.e., what affects the responses of subjects who are presented with the task. For example, when presented with this type of task, are subjects able to form impressions which are systematically related to the impressions intended by the performer, or, in other words, how accurate are these impressions? Finally, what kinds of inferential policies do subjects employ in making such judgments?

In general, the results indicate that over all conditions subjects show internally reliable judgmental systems as measured by the multiple correlation among cue values and responses for each subject ($\overline{R}$ = .55, p.<.01). Further, the mean absolute difference (mean error) between faculty self-ratings and subjects' estimates of these ratings is only 3.3. Thus, subjects are able to gain reliable impressions which reflect the intentions of the stimulus persons.

The lens model paradigm allows us to examine the judgmental process of each subject as well as overall group results. The correlations between each subject's judgments and each of the four cues, together with the multiple correlation among all cues and the subject's response describes the judgmental policy of each subject for the "likelihood of good relations" judgmental task. Examination of each individual subject's judgmental policy shows that the variance accounted for by a separate linear regression model for each subject varies but in virtually all cases adequately describes the judgment policy. The observed variation in policies suggests that different inference strategies are being used by subjects, that is, subjects whose judgments are equally well accounted for by the model in terms of <u>amount</u> of variance, are frequently found to weight specific cues differently in making their judgments.

Table I shows the cue weights and multiple correlations for four subjects who exemplify the larger subject population. This indicates, for example, that Subject 20 weighted each of the cues as follows: 1) formality- r = -.72; 2) personalization- r = .20; 3) barriers- r = -.74; and 4) status- r = -.64, with R = .80. In contrast, Subject 18 weighted the cues as follows: 1) formality- r = .01; 2) personalization- r = .33;

3) barriers- r = -.31; and 4) status- r = -.10, with R = .70. Thus, the variance is not completely accounted for by a linear model in either of these cases: however, our efforts did not exhaust all possible cues which might be used by subjects in making inferences in such interpersonal tasks. The present results indicate that the methodology used allows determination of at least some specific mechanisms employed by subjects in interpersonal situations and thereby supports the potential of this approach.

Insert Table I Here

A second question of concern in this investigation is if the reconceptualization of Goffman's view is of empirical value. A preliminary experiment was conducted focusing upon one of a number of variables which follow logically from Goffman's theory as described above.

Examination of the mean absolute predictive error for subjects in each of the three experimental conditions across the twenty stimulus persons indicates that subjects who were presented with only the audio tapes were significantly more accurate in their predictions than subjects in the other conditions ($F = 4.22$; $df = 2, 51$; $p < .05$). There were no differences among conditions in actual similarity between subjects' judgments of chances of good relations and the faculty self ratings. Thus, accounting for the above difference as a function of actual similarity is eliminated. Further, there was no difference between treatment means for the measure of assumed similarity (correlation of own judgment with prediction), nor was there any difference in consistency across conditions,

as measured by R^2 suggesting that cue-weighting or policy-matching, rather than differences in consistency of subjects' judgmental responses accounted for the differences between conditions.

In summary, the present results lend support to the reconceptualization of Goffman's views of self-presentation in terms of the theory and method of Probabilistic Functionalism. It would appear that this approach has important implications for the study of the interpersonal consequences of self-presentation. One parameter derived from Goffman's formulation was examined and found to indicate some non-obvious results. While many more questions are raised by this investigation than are answered, the potential for evaluating these issues seemingly lies within the scope of the lens model paradigm.

TABLE I

JUDGMENTAL POLICIES OF SELECTED SUBJECTS ON

"CHOICES OF GOOD RELATIONS" TASK

Cue-response r

Subject No.	Formality	Personalization	Barriers	Status	R
6	-.57	.36	-.34	.40	.66
18	.01	.33	-.31	-.10	.70
20	-.72	.20	-.74	-.64	.80
34	-.39	.00	-.37	-.63	.64

Figure 1

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